

## Decisions Already Made

by ExplosiveLamp

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Summary: the story of Rick Sanders, who is accidentally shot forward in time to the Human-Covenant war, where, what once was fiction has become reality. First attempt at writing, so please review. All copyrights go to their respective owners. rated M for violence

### 1. Arrival

July 19th, 2011 Tulsa, Oklahoma 10:33 PM

Everyone always told me "You'll find your place in the world someday, Rick. Just give it some time." I clearly hadn't because here I was, at 18, no job, no life, still sitting on the couch with an Xbox 360 controller in hand, sucking at my favorite game in the world, Halo: Reach. I was in the middle of an invasion game, on defense, playing on my favorite map, Spire. My team was about to return the core to the top of the spire when a Spartan came from behind a rock with a rocket launcher.

"Aw, crap!" was my reaction as he fired the rocket at my teammates and I. I managed to evade out of the way before it hit. My teammates were not so lucky. I switched weapons to my needler, but I needed to reload. I swore under my breath as the rocket hit my elite in the face. The guy who was controlling said Spartan, a friend of mine, laughed evilly and said,

"How did that rocket feel, Sanders?" Instead of respawning, however, my Xbox flashed the words "You suck" across the screen. As if I needed to be reminded. Confused, I got up and walked to the Xbox to see what was wrong. When I put my hand over the vent, instead of the usual heat my palm was met with about a million volts of electricity. I was violently sucked through a point in the middle of the vent. If I had had some time to think, I probably would have laughed because it looked like I was literally being sucked into the game.

After a few seconds of blackness, I was spat out in front of someone's armored green shin. I noticed that it was below freezing wherever I was. All that registered after that was pain, it was like I was being stretched out on a taffy puller. I could feel bones snapping and being realigned, my skin being stretched to fit the realignment of my bones. My hands felt like someone had put them in waffle irons, being simultaneously smashed and expanding, while someone else ripped off my pinkies but stopped halfway down and then decided to reattach it there. I passed out when my head decided to suck in my nose and rip apart my jaw.

Unknown time and location

I groaned as I slowly lifted myself off the floor. Every part of my body ached as if I had fallen off a cliff. My voice sounded so much deeper than usual. I opened my eyes. \_This isn't my living room...\_ I thought.

I had woken up in what looked like a purple and pink apartment. Bewildered, I tried to stand up. I got to a half-crouch before falling forward onto my face. \_What the...\_ I rolled over and propped myself up on my arms to see what was wrong. Instead of slipping on something, like I thought, I saw the problem was my new legs, which had two knees, the lowest of which was pointing backwards, and ended in a hoof-like foot. My jaw dropped, or at least it tried to. Instead it split into four parts and just hung open.

"Wah eh ell!" I was starting to freak out now. I looked at my hand. Sure enough, there were only two fingers on the middle of my hand and two thumbs on opposing sides from each other. My skin was dark brown and covered in tiny scales. I was covered in a black jumpsuit made of some kind of breathable plastic. \_Ok, \_I thought,\_ I'm an alien from a videogame, an elite to be precise, I'm in a strange apartment, and I have no idea where or when I am. First things first: figure out how to use these ridiculous mandibles\_.

â€¢â€¢â€¢â€¢â€¢â€¢â€¢a few hours laterâ€¢â€¢â€¢â€¢â€¢â€¢â€¢

After learning how to talk with my new mouth, and figuring out how to stand up, I tried my hand at walking. It was much harder than it looked. After about half an hour I figured out how to walk in a straight line. I looked like an idiot and I wobbled a lot, but I'd work on that later. For now, I wanted to explore the apartment. Through a small archway to my left was what I thought looked like my kitchen at home - only purple and pink. It had a large counter that wrapped all the way around the walls and a barstool on the other side of the counter not against the wall. There was a small pantry to the right of the counter. On the other side of the living room was a locked door and to the left of that, a bathroom with another sink, a shower, and a cabinet. I was playing with my mandibles in a mirror I found when a voice came over an intercom system. "Hello, it is nice to see you have awoken. I am Undi Telotee, I apologize for not being here when you awoke, but there are other duties to be performed on this ship."

The voice sounded female. I wondered how she was allowed on the ship, and what 'other duties' she could possibly be talking about, seeing as the covenant military was exclusively male. She answered my question without my having to ask.

"I am the head of the science department on the ship 'regretful transcendence' and you, Richard, are our newest project."

How did she know my name?

"I will be your mentor and guide while you learn the ways of our people. But first you must learn how to use your new body, although you have made considerable progress today by yourself, you still have much to learn," Undi said, "but for now you must rest."

The door that was locked earlier dinged and opened; there was a large bed inside with a table and what looked like an alarm clock. I couldn't read it. Not because of my vision, (which had actually gotten even better), because instead of numbers, the display had triangles: covenant language. "What is the date?" I asked.

"By your human calendar, it is... July 22nd, 2552." My eyes widened. Not only because I had been launched over 540 years into the future, I remembered what would happen in two days. I would be there for the battle of Reach.

July 23rd, 2552, 8:30 AM on board the 'Regretful Transcendence'

\_Please let it have been a dream, \_I told myself. \_I'll open my eyes and everything will be back to normal. \_I opened my eyes to see a pink colored wall. \_Damn it. \_I had gotten little sleep that night- or as Undi called it, "dark cycle", because I was too busy just sitting on my bed, thinking about what I might have to do tomorrow and for the next few months. First, of course, I would be trained. What then? Sent to almost certain doom against hordes of SPARTANs? Forced to commit countless acts of murder? Undi had not let me out of my apartment, and I hadn't even met her in person, which I was kind of looking forward to. I had always wondered what female sangheili looked like. The intercom activated and another elite's voice spoke, this one was male.

"A panel on your wall will open in a short while. Put on the armor and meet Undi at your front door when you are ready."

I heard a mechanic whir as the said panel swung open to reveal a set of blue minor armor. The helmet looked very shark- like in that it had two 'fins' on the side and ended in a tapered peak at the very back of the helmet. It came with an instructional program that played on a small data pad next to the armor rack. I disregarded it, saying to myself,

"I don't need no stinkin' instructions!" After about ten minutes of trial and error with more error than trial, I finally started up the program, taking about two minutes to put the armor on correctly. I walked over and stood by the only door that was still locked.

Undi came by about a minute later.

"Hello." she said, nearly making me jump out of my armor. She was wearing leaf- green armor and was looking at a data pad with several graphs on it. She stopped short as she looked up from her work to see me sprawled out on the floor, scrambling to get up. Undi gave a nearly inaudible chuckle before she offered me her hand and helped me up. I took it and was somewhat surprised at her strength as she

heaved me back up to my feet.

"We expected this to occur, which is why your first day of training will be on the basic functions of your new body and some features of your armor. But first," She put her data pad on a low table in the middle of the room and sat down on the chair directly behind it.

"Sit, I need to explain to you how you got here and I must present you with a choice." I quickly sat down on the couch to the right of her chair. She took a breath and began. "We found a large Forerunner artifact on the surface of one of your planets. As we went down to investigate it we were attacked by a large group of human soldiers and forced to fall back into the structure. We eventually eliminated all but one, who we found hiding in a corner (he had soiled himself), and forced him to activate the device we found inside. As it powered up, one of my soldiers who was helping me set up communications equipment stepped onto a panel which triggered another function of the device which we did not foresee, that it could bring back any being from the past and alter their genetic code to be the same species as the one who stepped on the panel. However," she sighed in disappointment, "The device only had enough charge to retrieve one person, you."

I gave an understanding nod, knowing exactly where this was going.

"We had only had two choices: we could kill whomever came out of the portal for heresy (we knew you were once a human, you did not come out of the portal a sangheili), or we could spare your life and," she spat out the next two words as if it were poison "induct you into the holy ranks of the covenant. We decided to take you aboard our ship and let you decide for yourself." she paused and let the words sink in. "You may choose to walk the holy path with us or you may seal your death. You have three of your hours." with that she left.

On board the 'Regretful Transcendence'

July 23rd 2552, 11:30 AM

I really didn't need those three hours; I knew exactly what I needed to do, not only for my survival, but also because I knew the entire chain of events from tomorrow until March of 2553, meaning I could steer clear of most things that would kill me. If I could survive until after the great schism, my continued survival was almost guaranteed. The door to the outside opened and Undi smugly walked in with two guards in red armor, Zealots. They were both holding carbines and had a holstered plasma rifle on their hips.

"Your decision?" she asked, giving what I could only guess was a smirk. I grinned back. "I," pausing for effect, the guard on the left gripped his carbine's handle tighter, "would like to join the covenant."

Undi's mandibles drooped in what I could guess was surprise and disappointment. Those guards were here to kill me.

"Well, um... We did not expect..." she stuttered.

"You thought you were gonna get to execute me, didn't you?" I retorted. She blushed, but instead of turning red, like a human, her light gray skin turned a very dark purple. Probably due to her blood,

and that of all sangheili, being purple.

"Ju- just come with me." she replied angrily and dragged me by the forearm out the front door.

## 2. A New Name

Undi dragged me through several hallways in the science department to an unused lab and cleared a table. "Sit." she said, and gestured towards a seat next to a disassembled fuel rod cannon. She left the room and the door locked behind her. About five minutes later an elite in ranger armor walked in, took off his helmet, sat down directly across from me and said, "I will be your instructor until Undi sees fit that you are ready to go into real training. My name is Y'tip Fuino. You may call me Y'tip, but your future mentors and commanding officers will require you to call them 'excellency' or 'master'." I nodded. He went on to explain how to maintain my claws, which had to be filed and sharpened, and the rows of razor sharp teeth lining the inside of my mouth, which needed to be cleaned with a brush that a human might use to scratch their back. As for diet, elites stuck mostly to meat, with a few fruits here and there. As he was explaining what kinds of foods I should avoid (including things that were perfectly fine for the other species to eat but would kill an elite) that I would find during my time as a soldier, my stomach gave a gigantic growl. I quickly said, "Sorry, I haven't eaten anything yet."

"That is fine, I was just about to suggest that I go retrieve something to eat," Y'tip quickly replied. He got up and went through the door, which locked behind him. After about ten minutes, I looked over at the fuel rod cannon and picked up a random piece that looked like the trigger housing. I had always wondered how you fired these things because I never saw a trigger on them in the games. Turns out, there was a fairly long trigger that would fit all the covenant species' fingers (except for jackals, who couldn't hold it up), but it was pulled into the handle when the safety was on. I put that down and picked up another piece: the scope display. I turned it on and discovered it was still connected to the scope. The scope was pointed behind me and on the screen was Y'tip holding two trays of food and a slightly irritated expression on his face. I turned around.

"Put that down." Y'tip snapped. I quickly put it back where I found it and took my food from him.

"Thanks," I said "but I just realized something."

"What's that?" he growled.

"I have no idea how to eat with this kind of mouth." he just laughed hysterically for a few moments, but stopped suddenly when he noticed I wasn't laughing too.

"You are serious?" I nodded. "Swallow it whole," he said simply, surprised I hadn't figured it out myself. I looked at my tray which had a long tong-like utensil, a knife, and several chunks of meat on it. I grabbed the tongs and gripped a small piece of the meat, which was kind of purple, and awkwardly stuck it into my mouth. Almost by reflex, my tongue snaked out and flattened so I could put the food on it. I dropped the meat onto my tongue, which curled up slightly and

brought the meat into my throat. I swallowed and thought to myself \*Weird, but effective.\* I finished eating in the same manner about ten minutes after Y'tip had finished his. He was still chuckling at my awkwardness. "Undi was not joking when she said you knew absolutely nothing," he said. The rest of the day was fairly uneventful. Y'tip showed me several functions of my armor, including the HUD functions (waypoints, shields, motion tracker), how to install and activate equipment and how to activate the energy daggers in the armor's forearm guards (which I had not been given for now obvious reasons). After that he quickly assembled and disassembled the fuel rod cannon (which was missing a part of the outer casing) and showed me what each of the parts did. A surprising amount of the bulk of the weapon was devoted to decorative curves, which I could only guess were purely for making the weapon look more elegant. After that, Y'tip said I could go back to my quarters. He left the room as Undi was unlocking it from the outside. She gave him a quick salute, then walked over to me. "Come. I am supposed to show you back to your quarters."

"Lead the way." I said.

We had just passed in front of the mess hall when Undi's PDA beeped. She pulled it from a clip on her thigh and pushed a button, which activated the screen. An elite in general armor appeared on screen and began talking in... I couldn't tell, it all sounded like gibberish to me. Undi jabbered back a reply to the general's statement and replaced the PDA on her hip and said,

"The general wants to see me on the command deck. You will have to find your quarters yourself. Find a data console and download a map of the ship to your HUD. It will guide you to your room."

She jogged in the direction of the bridge and left me alone. I turned on the translator inside my helmet, which, for some reason did not translate speech, only text, and looked around for a data console. I found one already in use and stood behind the sangheili occupant at a distance, so I could see how it was used. To my disappointment, you needed a forearm guard to use it. I tapped the occupant on the shoulder, hoping for my life he spoke English. I was relieved to see it was Y'tip.

"Hello there- um," he muttered the next few words so only I could hear him, "what is your sangheili name, again?"

I hadn't come up with one yet.

"um... R'tik... Remamee?" I whispered back.

"That is believable, but you will have to get Undi to register you for an ID. Speaking of which, where is she?"

"The general wanted to see her on the command deck, as for what I have no idea. I don't speak whatever language you guys use, but that's beside the point, I need to get back to my room, but I don't have a map, and I can't download one because I don't have any forearm guards. I was wondering if you could guide me to an armory to pick some up."

"Didn't Undi tell you the room number?"

"No, she said the map would tell me where to go." Y'tip sighed.

"You can't get armor without a valid ID, so you can't get those forearm guards. You are welcome to wait in my quarters until Undi finishes her business with the general." he motioned for me to follow him and began walking towards the rear of the ship. On our way there, I noticed more of the other covenant species walking around, most of them grunts. We had to wait at a crossways as a small swarm of drones passed us with no intention of stopping or of letting anyone get in their way. We turned the corner to see the swarm had knocked over some grunts and jackals and even a brute in their haste. The brute scowled at me in distaste as we passed.

"Where were they in such a hurry to go?" I asked after we were out of earshot of the others.

"Who knows? Yanme'e are not exactly the most sociable species in the covenant. They are intelligent, just in... A different way than we are." I knew that, but I didn't tell him. The only way events would go the way they did in the games, and therefore predictably, was if I kept my meddling to a minimum and told NO ONE of future events or how I knew about them. A few hallways later we came to Y'tip's cabin, which was much smaller than my apartment. It had only two rooms, a tiny bedroom with a cot and a dresser, with a minuscule bathroom in the corner, and the other room was kitchen/living room with a small sink and an armchair.

"Wow. This makes my apartment look like a freakin' luxury suite." I remarked.

"Actually, your apartment IS a luxury suite." Y'tip retorted, his voice absolutely oozing with envy. "You will be moved to a barracks like this when you begin your training, which will take about a month. Until then you will be watched over with the scrutiny a paranoid jackal watches his fellows."

July 24th, 2552, 9:00 A.M. on board the 'Regretful Transcendence'

Happy birthday to me. Yeah, right. What better a way to celebrate one's birthday than to begin training for killing millions of innocent civilians in the largest genocide in human history? None what so freakin' ever.

After yesterday's incident, Undi came to guide me back to my quarters and then hurried off to the armory to get me a pair of forearm guards. I was beginning to feel a little sorry for her, as I seemed to just get in her way. I was also tired of relying on someone else to bus me around like a child. I heard the front door open as I was pulling on my undersuit, which was really the only garment I had. Someone walked up to the bedroom's door, which had a little screen to the side so the occupant could see who was outside. I finished sealing the seams on the suit and walked over to the screen. Undi was outside.

"Come in," I said.

The door opened and she stepped inside. I turned away to open the armor rack, removed the helmet and put it on. When I turned back, I noticed she was wearing a fairly casual looking dress which hung just

below her ankles.

"umm..." I dumbly said. To my now alien brain, Undi looked attractive. Like, REALLY attractive. After a few seconds of mental blankness, I realized that she was speaking. I quickly snapped out of it and started listening.

"...ship has arrived at Sangheilios."

"What's that?" I asked. I still had to make it seem like I had next to no idea what was going on.

"The Sangheili homeworld," she said, "and your new home."

**\*\*Author's note: sorry to make all 12 of you wait so long. School and procrastination happened while I was writing this. Expect another long wait for chapter 3. Apologies in advance.\*\***

### 3. Sangheilios

Sangheilios surface, Zin state military spaceport.

July 24, 2552, 10:30 A.M.

On the phantom ride down from the ship, I felt very out of place due to the fact that I was the only one still wearing armor. Even the shipmaster had left his armor on board in lieu of a pair of pants and a tunic. No one seemed to notice or care, though. They were too exited to have a vacation or to see their mates and children again.

From what I could tell, the Zin state was on the planet's equator, and was covered in lush jungles. Perfect for 30 mile hikes to nowhere in particular.

"So, what are we doing here?" I asked Undi, who was walking several paces in front of me.

"We are here to get you into the covenant military and to let ME have a small break from the stresses of warfare while you train. I sent in the forms this morning."

"And what happens in the meantime while I wait for the approval?" Right as I finished my sentence, Undi stopped dead in her tracks with a horrified look on her face.

"I never thought about that." That made me stop mid stride as well.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean I never made arrangements for your housing. I can't rent a hotel room, they would all be taken. Apartment? Too expensive." she thought for several more minutes before coming up with a solution, and I could tell that she absolutely HATED it.

"It would appear that our only option is for you to stay with me at my home for the time being... Damn it," she growled.



July 24th, 2552, 11:45 A.M.

Zin state, Sangheilios

Undi's house was easily one of the most beautiful homes I had ever seen. It was built on a large hill that overlooked the vast jungles that the Zin state was so proud of. It had a large front porch with a cobbled walkway leading from the street below to the front door. The exterior was made of a dark sand colored stone and light, unpainted wood. Undi sighed as she put down her bags in the entryway away from the door and stood aside to let me in. I had to slide in sideways because my armor made it impossible to go through normally without scratching the doorframe. Inside the front door was a short entry hall which opened up to a sitting area with a low table in the center of the room, ringed with armchairs and a Sangheili-sized couch. Off to the left of that was a kitchen/dining room. Oddly enough, it looked nearly identical to a human kitchen, just a little bigger. To the left of the sitting area was a hall which had several bedrooms branching off of it. The backyard was accessible through a sliding door at the back of the kitchen.

"Thanks for letting me stay here, Undi."

She simply glared at me and said,

"The guest bedroom is the second door to the left. I'll meet you there shortly to give you some proper clothing." she slipped off her shoes, pushed them to the side, and walked to her room. I pulled off my boots and put them next to her shoes. I walked to the door she had told me to go to and pushed it open. I slid inside and looked around. Inside was a small dresser to my right with a mirror directly above, a closet through a door next to that, and a bed. I sat down and started pulling off my shoulder armor when Undi came in with a stack of clothes in each hand. She put them on top of the dresser, growled at me, then closed the door. I continued pulling off my armor and putting it in a bag that had been given to me before I had left the ship. I slipped off the undersuit and put on some blue pants made out of a denim-like fabric and a dark green tunic. They fit perfectly.

I walked into the sitting area and found Undi looking at a picture frame which stood on a dusty bookshelf in a secluded corner with a sad, almost longing expression. It looked like she was looking back on a very happy event. She didn't seem to notice me, so I silently walked around her to see what the picture was. In the picture, Undi was standing next to a male sangheili with brown skin the same shade as mine. He was wearing a formal robe with intricate designs starting at the collar and going down to below the frame. Undi was wearing the same dress she wore today, and both of them looked like they were having a good time at whatever party they were at.

"Who is that with you in that picture?" I asked.

She turned around, some of the sadness was still there, but most if it had been replaced with the utter hatred I had been met with in the guest room.

"That," she spat angrily, "is none of your business." She let out a feral snarl, snatched the picture from the shelf, and stomped off to her room.

\_What's her problem\_? I understood that she didn't want me in her house, but why? She had been so much kinder to me on the 'Regretful Transcendence', so what had happened since then? What had I done to deserve this kind of hatred?

July 24th, 2552, 2:45 P.M.

Zin state, Sanghelios

I finally decided to take the direct approach and ask Undi why she was so angry at me. That, and I was kind of worried about her. She hadn't come out of her room since the incident with the picture. I made her a sandwich, or something as close to a sandwich as I could with the stuff in her fridge. Sangheili don't seem to believe in packaged lunch meat. Or pre-sliced bread.

I walked up to her bedroom door with the sandwich-thing on a plate in my hands and rapped my knuckles on the door.

"Undi? Are you ok?"

"Go away."

"I made you some food." after a brief pause, her door opened and she stepped out wearing a dark purple robe. She looked at the sandwich and asked,

"What the hell is that?"

"A sandwich." She lifted an eyebrow. "Human food, but I made it with stuff from your fridge." She was about to slam the door in my face but I quickly said, "Wait!" and put my foot in the way. Not the best idea when you aren't wearing shoes.

"Ow." I said. She tried to slam the door on my foot again, but I managed to hold it open before she broke my foot.

"Look, the real reason I came was to ask you a question; why are you so mad at me?" Her anger seemed to melt away into the same sad expression she wore while looking at the photo.

"Is something wrong?" I asked. She remained silent, just leaning against the doorframe, an absent look in her eyes. I sighed and began to walk away. \_Guess I'm not going to get an answer from her.\_

"He was my mate." Undi said suddenly.

I turned around and asked "Who?"

"The man in the picture. It was taken on our wedding night."

"What does that have to do with what I asked you?"

"It has everything to do with it. He and the entire battalion he was leading were killed in the war by just one of their demons. They fought valiantly, but the demon used dishonorable tactics to get an advantage. After the planet was cleansed, the shipmaster himself came to tell me the horrible news of his death. But five years later, you came along, and every time I look at you, it reminds me of him, because you look the same, you sound the same, you even have the same

first name! I wanted to send you off to the military and be done with you, but I had forgotten the approval period, so now you're in my home wearing his clothes! In my mind, it's like he's back, but he isn't here, you are, and I can't separate my feelings for him without hating you..."

Holy. Crap. I hadn't expected that much emotion coming from her, much less in the cliché soap opera love confession style. So instead of an intelligent reply, I just stood there like a moron, a dumbstruck expression on my face, staring at Undi, who was curled up against the doorframe. I really wanted to say something to comfort her, but I was afraid she'd take it the wrong way.

"Umm.. Wow." I finally said, and sank down to the floor. "I never realized-" she cut me off before I could finish my sentence.

"No, no, no. It isn't your fault." Another awkward silence followed.

Undi reached out for the plate, grabbed the sandwich and began eating it, ripping off chunks and popping them in her mouth.

"Not bad for a human recipe."

August 22nd, 2552, 8:00 A.M. Zin state military training facility

I carefully aimed my beam rifle at the cardboard cutout of a human silhouette down range about 500 yards away, flipped on the power to the firing circuit, and pulled the trigger. Pew. Headshot.

"A beautiful shot, R'tik. You will have no issues when we are put into combat," said my best and only friend in this hellhole, Nima Vazikee. While I was a brilliant marksman with many of the covenant's precision weapons, (including the needle rifle, and, although I hated the weapon with a passion, the focus rifle) Nima was a terror to face in close quarters combat, with his favorite weapon being his own two fists. I had seen him floor the Sangheili officer in charge of us in the sparring ring in a mere 5 seconds. He could floor anyone else in less than that. He stood a few inches taller than me at about 8'10", which was weird for me because as a human, I was always very tall for my age. We were supposed to report to the 'Regretful Transcendence' in an hour, but I had wanted some extra target practice before I left because the range there wasn't very big.

"Come on, we need to get going. The phantom leaves in 10 units." I said. I attached the beam rifle to my back and began walking towards the waiting phantom. Nima stood up and jogged a few steps to catch up to me.

After a few moments of silence, he asked me,

"So, who is the female who keeps coming here and pulling you aside? Is she your mate-to-be or something?"

I snapped my head to look at him in surprise.

"What! N-no, we aren't-" Nima just looked amused at my reaction. "She's just a friend of mine."

"How good of a friend?" I glared at him. "Okay, fine, fine." he said,

with that stupid grin still on his face. Undi had been to the facility on a regular basis, mostly to teach me to speak and read Sangheilian. I was pretty fluent by now, but my vocabulary still had some pretty big holes in it. For instance, I didn't know how to express that something was urgent. That might be an issue later on.

August 22nd, 2552 9:12 AM

On board the 'Regretful Transcendence' en route to Reach

Just like Y'tip said, I was put into one of those teeny tiny barracks toward the end of the ship. This would have been fine with me if I had gotten any other roommate than the one I was currently bunking with. Sremm Vakrelee was a pompous, self centered, asshole who would probably date himself if he could. On top of that, he was an aristocrat, raised to think he was better than everyone else. I had never met a bigger jerk in my entire life. Sure, there had been humans that I had known beforehand who came close, but this guy...

The first time I met him I had stepped into the barracks we were assigned to for the first time. I had just put down my stuff on my bunk when I heard an energy sword activate behind me.

\_A fight? On the first day?\_ I quickly thought. I turned around, expecting to see two other guys about to tear each other to shreds. In actuality, I had the twin points of an energy sword inches from my lower set of mandibles, the sword's owner smirking at me with wolfish delight. I slowly raised my hands, the universal symbol of "don't kill me, I surrender." He flicked the sword downwards and slightly to the side, leaving two perpendicular scratches on my chestplate about 1/16th of an inch deep and walked away with a smug grin plastered to his face.

As I walked into my quarters on the 'Regretful Transcendence', I heard the familiar crash of an energy sword igniting. I turned around, and without thinking, I kicked the owner's hand, sending the sword to the floor, then kicked the sword across the room, where it skittered under a bunk. I looked up at the angry sangheili whom I had just disarmed and saw it was none other than my nemesis, Sremm Vakrelee.

"You are becoming predictable, Sremm." I told him.

Author's note: Well that was done a little sooner than expected...

#### 4. Brenton

Right as I was about to leave my quarters for dinner, my forearm guard gave a loud beep. I opened the panel on my left arm and opened the message, which was our official assignment to a squad as well as our orders. Scrolling down the list I found my name in a sniper unit-right next to Sremm's.

"God dammit," I muttered under my breath. The rest of my squad, recon squad 3, consisted of three minor domos including myself, Sremm, being the second in command (simply being an aristocrat automatically

bumped you up to major) and my commanding officer, an Ultra. I looked for Nima's name and found that he would be one of the first groups to be sent down, assault squad 1, the one that my squad would follow. I tapped my name to see what my squad's orders were. There was a set of coordinates and a short paragraph. It read:

'Assist the assault squads with the setup and defense of communications jammers in the human city of 'New Alexandria' so the battlecruiser 'Restraint and Tranquility' can effectively cleanse the area. Take extreme caution, there have been several sightings of numerous demons within the area.' The departure time was set for around 7:00 A.M. tomorrow. That all added up perfectly with the events of the game. I was just worried we would run into Noble six while we were in the air, I didn't feel like being shot down God-only-knows-how-high from the ground, especially when I had surviving to do. That was the main reason I became a sniper; the farther away I am from my target, the farther he has to run to get to me, and the more time for me to ki- to make sure he doesn't get to me.

August 23rd, 2552 6:33 AM

On board the 'Regretful Transcendence' in orbit above planet Reach

The ship gave a lurch towards the front as it decelerated and dropped back into normal space. I found a window that looked off the starboard side of the ship and saw the still beautiful, war-scarred planet Reach below us. I looked into space directly outside the window and saw a vaguely familiar space station. I zoomed in on the text on part of the station with my helmet's built in zoom... thingy.

I never got a chance to read it as the station was blown into a trillion tiny bits by a plasma torpedo shot from further up the ship. After a few seconds, a voice blared over the intercom,

"Assault and reconnaissance teams 1 through 6 report to the phantom bay immediately for deployment!" Several doors along the hallway opened almost immediately, the corresponding room's occupants dashing down the hallway in my direction. I let a few pass me before following them to a seemingly empty room which directly adjoined a docking station, complete with two forcefield walls which kept the void of space at bay, where 6 phantoms were in the final stages of launch prep. Several panels of the wall opened to reveal some weapon racks from which I picked up a beam rifle, 3 recharge packs, a needle rifle and 6 magazines for it along with a couple plasma grenades. After all of these had been put into the right compartments, I headed for the third phantom. I was the second one there, the other sangheili there was a major from assault squad 3, the squad we would be working in tandem with. Within 10 minutes, the rest of the members of both squads, including a small horde of grunts and a couple jackals, had geared up and were ready to depart. There was a pair of hunters with us, but instead of the shield and fuel rod cannon that were used for battle, they had large claws that looked more suited to heavy lifting than battle. They were carrying their shields and gun with them, in case they needed to fight. As soon as the last phantom had been loaded up and the doors closed, the landing parties took off through the forcefield and began their descent to the planet below. The ride was uneventful until the ship entered the atmosphere. Sure,

some bumpiness was to be expected considering how fast we were descending, but all of the anti-aircraft shells exploding around the phantoms didn't exactly make the ride any smoother. Finally, the ship came to a halt after what seemed like hours of constant lurching and the sound of explosives detonating dangerously close to the craft. With a soft hiss, the bay doors and gravity lift port opened. Outside I could see a large part of the New Alexandria skyline from my vantage point thousands of feet above the city streets, which I could just barely make out. One of the grunts waddled up next to me and said,

"That's a long, long fall," in his high-pitched, squeaky voice.

"That it is." I replied. There was no hurry to get out, so most of the cargo and soldiers exited the vehicle through the lift with the exception of the hunters, who wouldn't fit through. As soon as the phantom had been emptied onto the circular landing pad, the ultras began barking orders to secure the area. The grunts were the first to enter the building, closely followed by the assault squad and my team. The hunters and phantom stayed on the pad to provide some backup in case we needed it.

The door opened up to a lobby with several overturned potted shrubs and a small ficus tree standing next to a sloped desk with a computer screen sitting on top of it. Two hallways on opposite sides of the room stood in darkness with lights flickering in the distance. The leader of the assault squad quickly barked out,

"Spread out and search every room! I don't want any surprises." I looked to the leader of my team for our instructions.

"Secure the area," he said.

"Yes, Excellency." was the collective reply of the entire unit. I pulled out my needle rifle and popped a cartridge into the weapon. I decided to look behind the desk first. I walked around the edge of the desk and looked underneath. Nothing but a trashcan and some candy wrappers.

"Clear." I said. I looked to the ultra, who motioned for the squad to follow him down the hallway to the left.

"Vakrelee, take point." Sremm stepped towards the front of the group and readied his sword. The first rooms we searched were the bathrooms. I stepped through the door to the men's bathroom and started checking the stalls, starting with the furthest from me. Nothing interesting there. I found the lightswitch and turned on the light to better check the corners. On my way out I glanced in the mirror and got my first good look at my new face. I really did look like Undi's husband, with just one exception. While his eyes were a deep blue and were world-weary, mine were sky blue, and I looked scared. I felt scared. There was something else, something I couldn't put my finger on. I pushed it to the back of my mind and stepped from the room.

"Clear."

We systematically searched each room in the same way. Finally, we reached the last door of the hallway. The second Sremm stepped

through the door, his shields flared as a gunshot resounded throughout the hall. He quickly stepped behind the wall again before the shooter could get in any more shots.

"How many were there?" the ultra asked in a quiet voice.

"I saw only one, an imp, who shot me. There is enough cover for there to be at least ten more." Sremmm replied in an equally quiet voice.

"Alright..." the ultra said, thinking fast. "Everyone prime a grenade." I pulled out both of mine. No one else moved.

"Am I the ONLY ONE who brought grenades?" I whispered. Everyone else started shuffling through every compartment and pocket they had. One of the other minors found a spare plasma grenade in his pack, which he tossed to me. I handed all three to the ultra who lit and tossed them in. The person inside let out a bloodcurdling scream as he was stuck and the grenades exploded. The ultra gave me the signal to move in. I readied my needle rifle and slowly peeked my head around the doorway. Much of what was left of the contents of the room had been reduced to a large pile of ash and rubble. I glanced up and saw a charred human skull embedded in the ceiling from the explosion. I stepped into the room and aimed my needle rifle at the only desk that still stood and slowly crept my way towards it. I placed my boot under the edge of the desk and quickly flipped it over. There was nothing there except the DMR the human had shot Sremmm with.

"Clear," I said to the rest of the squad. We returned to the lobby and met up with the assault squad, who had cleared the other half of the building. They had not met any human resistance (if you count a lone marine resistance) on their half of the building. I noticed they all had at least two grenades with them. We went back out to the landing pad and began to assemble and move the communications jammer into the building.

"Renamee!" My head snapped in the direction of the voice calling my name. It was Sremmm's. "Since the mgalekolo are otherwise occupied with moving the jammer, would you be so kind as to carry one's shield?" He pointed to one of the huge slabs of metal that the hunters carried with them with a malicious grin. I looked over to the other one and saw at least twenty of the grunts struggling to hold up the gigantic object, with another five making their way over to help their kin. I looked back down to the one I was supposed to carry. I had never been very strong as a human, so my expectations for my abilities now compared to other sangheili were a bit low. I crouched down, wrapped my hands around the edge, and lifted the end up about four inches from the ground. It felt like it weighed several tons, which was probably accurate.

\_Some thanks for being the only one who came prepared,\_ I thought angrily to myself. I started to slowly drag the shield across the pad. As it scraped across the surface of the pad, it made the most horrible screeching noise, kind of like fingernails being dragged against a chalkboard, only much louder, and immensely more painful to listen to. Apparently, most of the other soldiers agreed with me because the major from the assault squad had another two of his minors help me with the shield. After setting up the jammer in the building's circular, multi-level cafeteria, getting the hunters back on the phantom, and getting myself into a well-hidden position on the

second level of the room, I had a lot of waiting to do.

August 23rd, 2552 10:36 A.M.

New Alexandria, planet Reach

My mind has always had a habit of wandering when I'm bored, and right now was no exception. I was sifting through my memories of my life before being shot forward in time, trying to remember who my friends and family were. I could barely remember their names. I had never been good with names, so this didn't really bother me that much. What really scared me was that I couldn't remember any of their faces, or what their voices sounded like. I made a mental note to go pay them a visit, but I remembered,

\_Oh, right. They've been dead for around 500 years now.\_ That really depressed me. Any part of my past life had probably been lost or crumbled to dust hundreds of years ago. Photos, home videos, my house, everything. All of my past as a human, gone. I thought about that for a second. Human. Just what was it to be human? A simple arrangement of genes? True, if you tweak the right ones you can drastically change a being's outward appearance, myself being a perfect example. \_Stupid Forerunners, what with their combination of time travel and genetic alteration. I wonder how "human" the forerunners considered themselves. Well, they did sacrifice them-\_ My train of thought was brought to an abrupt halt as an entire platoon of no less than fifty humans stormed through the door to the cafeteria, guns blazing.

"HUMANS!", one of the grunts screamed, right before being shot in the face. At once, the rest of the covenant forces in the vicinity were up and had opened fire on the attacking human soldiers. I pulled out my needle rifle and aimed the weapon at the head of a particularly brave human who was standing up from behind an overturned table and quickly gunning down the grunts with his DMR. I paused. Just a month ago, if only for a few seconds, I was a human as well. I changed my aim and shot him in the arm, which caused him to drop to his knees and fall back safely behind the table. As he hit the floor he screamed,

"SNIPER! Get down!" All the remaining soldiers, who had completely eradicated the grunts, and were quickly overpowering the last two elites of the assault squad, dove under tables and behind pillars to escape my line of sight. The rest of my squad attempted to scare them from their cover, but to no avail. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw some movement in the entrance to the cafeteria-turned-warzone. I aimed my rifle at the door in time to see a rocket fly from just inside the doorway to the ground in between the two surviving elites. The explosion instantly killed one and knocked out the shields of the other. He was quickly killed by a headshot from the downed soldier I had shot earlier. I sat down behind my cover.

\_This is bad, this is really, really, REALLY, bad. How am I going to get out of this? Think. Think!\_ I heard scuffling and gunshots above me, where the ultra and the other minors were. That quickly died down with the death screams of three elites and at least nine humans. I poked my head up and looked across the room at where Sremm was stationed. His focus rifle lay abandoned, leaning against the railing. I looked towards the jammer and saw it was being rigged with what looked like C-4. I hid myself again, grabbed my needle rifle,



and flipped open the hatch. As the half empty canister flew over my shoulder, it landed on the head of the guy setting up the explosives.

"Brenton," I heard him say. "Go see what caused that." I heard a "Yessir." and the sound of armored boots walking up stairs. I flipped a table and hid myself behind it as I heard the footsteps come ever closer. They paused at the doorway for a second before continuing, only much slower. Brenton slowly crept around the table, holding a shotgun. I pointed my needle rifle at him, which he quickly kicked out of my grip. He then bashed me with the butt of his shotgun twice in the face. I didn't feel the first impact, as my shields took the brunt of the force, but the second one knocked off my helmet and sent stars flying across my field of vision. He slowly knelt down to look me in the eye and slowly said,

"You know who you look like? The sonuvabitch who killed my entire family without so much as flinching five years ago on Taurus V. You know what eventually happened to him? I blew his damned head off with THIS gun." He lifted the weapon slightly to show emphasis. "And you know what? I'm feeling a little nostalgic today. How would you like to follow in his footsteps?" My vision finally cleared as he stood up and pumped the shotgun, chambering a new shell. Time seemed to slow to a crawl as the empty shell hit the floor.

\_I've come too far\_, I thought as he raised the gun to my face, \_to die now. \_As fast as I could, I swung my left arm up to knock the gun away from my face. My arm made contact with the end of the gun and pushed it to the left. It went off right next to my head and above my left shoulder. I twisted my hand to grab the barrel, yanked it from his grip, and threw the weapon aside. As I stood up, he stumbled backwards, whipped out his magnum, and aimed it at me. I pounced at him and managed to land on him, knocking his pistol out of reach. He scrambled out from under me and yanked his combat knife from its sheath. I lunged again. This time, he sidestepped me and jammed the knife into my left shoulder, leaving the joint useless. I screamed in pain and whirled around to face him. He had adopted a boxing-like stance and had a slightly scared look in his eyes, but a determined grimace on his face. The same expression I saw in myself in the mirror earlier. The Sangheili part of my brain saw this as a weakness and completely took over. Without really knowing it, I reached over to my right arm with my left, completely disregarding the screaming pain in my shoulder, and activated the energy blade in my forearm guard. The rest was a bloody blur, but when I finally came out of my rampage, I saw the bodies of twenty dead humans, all of them with either bloody holes in their heads or charred stumps and holes where limbs, hearts, and brains used to be. I looked down at myself. My armor was completely coated in blood, some of it my own, most of it human. In my left hand was a jammed M6D whose barrel and handle were caked with blood. And in my right, a piece of charred purple metal which had blood splattered all over it. I realized what I had done and began to feel light-headed. I dropped both weapons and stumbled toward a chair. I took two steps, tripped and passed out.

## 5. Kat

August 23, 2552 unknown time

Unknown location

"Uuuungh..." As I drifted back into consciousness I heard the low hum of an engine and indistinct voices. I opened my eyes and saw two blurred blue shapes in front of a purple background. I was lying on my back on a cold, hard surface. Most of my armor had been removed, only my right shoulder plate and my upper leg armor remained on. My left shoulder felt stiff, and it stung a little. I blinked a couple of times to clear my vision. I was in a phantom, and the two blue blobs were minor domos, one of which was sitting against the wall to the left of me. His hands were covered in purple blood and he had a medical kit full of bandages in his lap. The marine's combat knife was lying next to his foot, also covered in my blood. The other one was conversing with the pilot. I sat up and leaned against the wall. The sangheili next to me noticed my movement and called to the other one,

"Nima! Your friend is awake!"

Nima turned around and instantly looked relieved. He walked over to me and squatted down.

"How long was I out?" I asked him

"A few hours. You lost a lot of blood." I looked down at my left shoulder, which was tightly wrapped in a bandage.

\*Sure... Blood loss... Right...\*

"Where are we?" I asked him.

"On our way out of the city. The area is about to be glassed."

The ultra peeked his head out of the cockpit and quickly asked,

"Can you stand up?"

"Yes, I think so."

"Good, now get suited up and be on the lookout for humans. I don't feel like being shot down."

\*No wiser words have ever been spoken.\*

August 23, 2552 1:14 PM

Skies above New Alexandria, planet Reach

After getting back into my armor, which had been tossed in an incoherent pile in an abandoned corner of the dropship, I found my needle rifle on a nearby weapons rack. I knew it was mine because it was the only one almost completely coated in human blood. I found a rag and tried to wipe off as much as I could. I managed to get most of it off, but the rag was soon too soaked to be able to absorb any more. With an exasperated sigh, I tossed the rag aside and took watch over the abandoned streets of the doomed city. As soon as I had settled into a comfortable position, there was a loud explosion and a blinding flash of light. I whipped around and saw a huge column of orange plasma burning through buildings and moving slowly away from us. The phantom kept its course, despite the threat of being accidentally vaporized. Up ahead I saw a short, one story building

with the ceiling smashed in. I couldn't see inside because of the shadows cast by the smoke and rainclouds above. I aimed my rifle into the the hole and saw three humans dart past my sights. As another two jogged behind the first three, time slowed to a crawl. The smell of blood right next to my face once again brought out the feral killing machine that seems to come with being sangheili. I locked on to the closest one's head and pulled the trigger. The round whizzed through the air, punctured my target's helmet, and flew out the other side, embedding itself in the floor. As she dropped to the ground, the other human turned and caught her. It was then that I got a good look at her. She was wearing sky blue armor, her right arm was robotic, and her helmet had a wide, silver visor. That was Kat. The other human grabbed his deceased teammate's magnum and returned fire. I shot off a few more rounds and backed into the ship. The pilot turned the craft away from the Spartans and sped out of the city as fast as the engines would allow. After the bloodlust had worn off after a few seconds, it finally hit me just what I had done. I slumped against the wall and sunk down to the floor, appalled at what my very nature as a sangheili had caused me to do. I was yanked to my feet by Nima, who asked,

"What happened? How many were there?"

"I... I have killed a demon. There were five. I got one." I replied, trying to sound proud of myself. I was anything but proud, I felt awful. Nima laughed merrily and told me,

"Well, it looks like you just might get promoted when we get back to the 'Regretful Transcendence', congratulations, my friend!" there was a round of less enthusiastic "Congratulations!" from the rest of the occupants of the ship as the craft slowly flew up and away from the burning city.

August 23, 2552 2:45 PM

On board the 'Regretful Transcendence' in orbit over planet Reach

After the phantom had docked and I had completely cleaned and put away my needle rifle and the subsequent scolding from the weapons master about my beam rifle, (which was still in the city) I went to my cabin to shower off and get the blood off my armor. When I opened the door to the tiny apartment I could hear water running already.

\*That's weird...\* I thought.

The water shut off and I could hear some rustling inside the bathroom.

"Is someone there?" I said, loudly enough for anyone inside the barracks to hear. The bathroom door opened and Sremm stepped out, wrapped in a bathrobe and a towel slung over his shoulder.

"WHERE THE HELL HAVE YOU BEEN!" I screamed at him. He suddenly turned his head in my direction. He seemed surprised to see me.

"I thought you were dead!"

"Obviously not! Where have you been?"

"I was picked up by an evac phantom and brought here shortly after those humans arrived."

"Well while you were 'evacuated' I had to fight the rest of the humans that were there. Then I was picked up by assault squad 1's phantom, which was on it's way out of the city. Which was being glassed." I left out the part where I killed Kat because even thinking about it made me sick.

Without even saying anything, he turned and walked into his half of the bunk room.

\*Whatever.\* I washed the blood off of my armor and myself and walked out the door. I flipped open the panel on my forearm guard and punched in Undi's name. Her basic information, which included a way to contact her, her age, and her name appeared on screen. I swept over the information and found the number for her office. I tapped the number and called her. A few seconds later she answered.

"Hello, R'tik."

"Hey, can I talk to you somewhere private? I need to ask you something."

"Like what?"

"Something happened today and I need to know whether or not I should be concerned about it."

"I see. Meet me in my apartment in a few units. We will not be subject to prying eyes and ears there."

"Alright. Thank you. See ya later."

"Goodbye." With that, she hung up. I pulled up her profile again in the ship's database and found where she was staying in the ship. Her office was in the science sector of the ship, towards the bridge in the lower levels. Her apartment was close to her office, only a few hallways with fewer turns separated the two rooms. I marked the entrance to Undi's apartment with a navpoint and began to make my way there. The ship was about a half mile long, so it took me around half an hour to get there. Once I had found the right room, I pressed the button next to the door that alerted the occupant to the presence of a visitor. There was some shuffling inside for a few seconds, then the door opened. Undi was wearing her scientist armor. She gestured me into the living room, looked in the hallway to make sure I was not followed, then closed the door.

"What did you need to ask me about?" she asked. I told her what happened with the marines in the city, and how I had blacked out.

"Hmm... Were you under a lot of stress or extremely angry?"

"Well, yeah. I honestly thought I was going to die."

"Okay. Well, that is not all that unusual. It is a defense mechanism which gives us greater speed, strength, and agility for a short period of time. Kind of like a human adrenaline rush. The intensity

and frequency differs between individuals."

"Good to know...", I mumbled. After that, I made my excuses and left.

Author's note: Yeah, I know. That was a really weak ending. I had an exceptionally bad bout of writer's block and I couldn't think of anything better. Chapter 6 might take awhile too.

## 6. SWORD Base

August 23rd, 2552 3:36 PM I opened the door to my barracks and saw Sremm sitting on a stool, hunched over and fiddling with a wooden ball.

>"What's that?" I asked him, gesturing to the object.<br>"It is an arum, certainly you received one as a child," he replied in a rather condescending tone. I hesitated for a second before I spoke, and it looked like he might have noticed.

>"Of course," I said. "May I see for a second?" He tossed it underhanded in my direction. I caught it with both hands and got a good look at it. It was made of a dark wood and it looked like it had seen quite a bit of use. The finish was chipped off in some places and where the finish was still intact, it was heavily scuffed. It was about the size of a basketball and the surface had several cut holes in seemingly random places. In one of the holes, I could see almost to the arum's core. There were six layers, including the sphere that made up the center of the orb. Each of the layers was made of a progressively lighter colored wood.<br>"It looks like you're pretty close to solving it," I said, and tossed the arum back to him. He caught it and hunched back over, jiggling the various spheres around. I walked into the bunk area to my bed, grabbed the datapad on the stool I used as a nightstand, and practiced reading Sangheilian. About a half an hour later, I got bored and stood up. Sremm was still working on the arum. I decided to head to the training area to get some hand-to-hand combat training. I wasn't about to let something like the incident with the marine happen again.

August 26th, 2552 10:00 AM ONI SWORD base courtyard 2, planet Reach "Again!" Nima said for the fortieth time that morning. After trying- and failing- to get any kind of training at the on-board gym, Nima agreed to help me improve my hand to hand combat skills. We had set up a makeshift sparring ring out of boxes and bits of debris in the center of the courtyard, the huge base looming over us like a giant, flaming tombstone. No one had bothered to put out the raging fires in the upper floors, the planet's surface was going to be reduced to glass in a matter of weeks anyway.

>I stood up and took a ready stance, preparing to be knocked down once again. Nima did the same, except he was already standing and had his mandibles posed into an encouraging grin. Regardless of how many times Nima told me how much better I was compared to yesterday or the day before, I simply refused to believe that I was any good. Nima gestured for me to make the first move. I took two steps toward him and quickly spun my body clockwise, bringing my right leg upwards in an arc which would end at Nima's head. He easily caught my leg three inches from his face and yanked it forcefully towards him, knocking me off balance and therefore, my other foot. My back hit the concrete hard, closely followed by my head. I could feel the first impact through my armor, but I was not wearing a helmet. The 15 or so grunts stationed with us that were gathered around the ring whooped and

cheered at my defeat. I snarled at them, which shut them up quite nicely. I hauled myself to my feet once again with a quiet sigh, gingerly touching the giant golf ball- sized lump on the back of my head. Nima walked over to me and said,<br>"An interesting choice of moves for an opponent directly in front of you. Next time, aim towards the chest. It's harder to block something from there. Is your head undamaged?"

>"There's going to be a nasty bruise there later," I replied, "but I'll be fine."<p>

We continued our sparring for another ten or so minutes before we were interrupted by the sound of one of the huge anti-aircraft cannons charge a shot and fire. A few seconds later, a pack of brutes ran past us towards the gate, screaming at the top of their apish lungs, "HUMANS! PREPARE TO DEFEND THE BASE!" My stomach lurched. I ran for the edge of the ring and grabbed my helmet and the first two weapons I could find: a plasma rifle and a focus rifle. I tossed Nima his plasma repeater and ran to find some cover. I found some in the form of a conveniently placed concrete barrier close to a door in the middle of the courtyard. Suddenly, there was a loud explosion in the distance. \*That'll be the anti- aircraft cannon.\* Seconds later, another. \*And there goes the other one.\* For several seconds, there was near silence, broken only by the terrified whimpers of the grunts. Then, I heard a noise, just barely audible over the sounds of war on the other side of the base. I turned around and saw a beat up pelican with plasma burns all along the underside lowering itself into the courtyard. I was about to warn the others, but my warning was drowned out by the pelican's machine guns as they sprayed hot lead into the nearest pack of around 12 grunts, killing three before they even had time to react. The rest shrieked in surprise and panic, then scattered. By then, the rest of the encampment had opened fire, spiker and concussion rifle rounds sailing through the air alongside needles and plasma bolts of varying colors. The pelican's gunner continued to fire into the horde as the bay doors opened and a dozen or more ODSs jumped from the still-hovering vehicle. The craft began to ascend as soon as the last of the soldiers had hit the ground, but before it could get out of range, one of the grunts had regained his senses and released a full salvo from his plasma launcher.

Unfortunately for the pilot, all four shots landed directly on the glass surrounding the cockpit. The subsequent explosion, which completely vaporized the cockpit and its panicked occupants, went unnoticed as two of the ODSs opened fire while the rest of the team ran for cover behind one of the large shipping crates. I aimed my focus rifle at one of the troopers' torsos and pulled the trigger. The shot wasn't meant to kill him, just to force him to take cover. The beam hit him in the chest and left his chestplate smoking, but instead of ducking back into cover, he aimed his assault rifle towards me and emptied the rest of the half-spent magazine in my direction. I ducked behind the barrier as quickly as I could. As soon as the sound of bullet impacts had ceased, I looked over the barrier to see if he had slipped into cover. He had not, and another swarm of bullets whizzed past my head, a few of them bouncing off my shields. I ducked back behind the barrier and tried to think of a way to get out of this alive without killing anyone.

>There wasn't one.<br>Growling at myself, I put my emotions in the back of my mind, leaving only my will to survive. I lifted the focus rifle and looked through the scope at the ODS who had been shooting at me earlier. He was returning fire at a pair of brutes, completely occupied with the spiker rounds whistling past him. I trained the reticle on his head and pulled the trigger. The super-hot beam of

light hit him square in the visor and completely cooked him in his armor before he even had time to react. The other trooper saw his comrade fall to the ground in a smoking heap and hesitated just long enough for a brute to get around him and impale the distracted soldier on the end of his spiker.

>"Flush them out!" I heard the brute chieftain scream to everyone. At his command, a group of six grunts followed by a pair of brutes armed with concussion rifles left their cover and cautiously moved toward the shipping crate. When they turned the corner, they were showered with bullets, but a well-placed shot from one of the brutes sent most of the squad of humans sailing through the air. There were several screams from behind the crate, followed by another concussion blast, which sent the dead bodies of four troopers flying in the same direction as their still-living squadmates. Before the disoriented soldiers could gather their wits, the rest of the camp opened fire. Without really thinking, I killed another as the other seven members ducked behind smaller boxes or concrete barriers. One of the troopers behind a box pulled a sniper rifle off of his back and aimed into the crowd of covenant. He pulled the trigger and there was a cry of pain as a brute fell to the ground with a hole in his chest. Another burst from my focus rifle forced him behind the box again. The two sides exchanged fire for about twenty minutes before the last human was finally killed by a grenade. Finally, silence. Several seconds passed before the ultra in charge of the camp broke the silence.<br>"Take note of the dead and report their names to me. Their names must be honored for their Journey to begi-"

>He was cut off by a rumbling noise coming from the glacier, followed by a deafening crash and a large plume of glittering ice shards that shot up maybe 300 feet from where the surface of the glacier used to be. I turned away from the spectacle and looked for Nima. I couldn't see him from my position, so I stepped out from behind the barrier to look for him. After about thirty seconds of looking for him, I realized it was a very real possibility that he might have died. I began searching frantically for him. I finally found him facedown on a small pool of his own blood behind a small crate, which, judging from the huge streak of blood trailing from a point about ten feet away, he had dragged himself behind during the heat of battle. He had what appeared to be a throwing knife lodged in the side of his uppermost thigh. I dropped to my knees and checked him for a pulse. It was there, still going strong. I dropped my ear next to his head to check if he was still breathing. He was. \*Oh, thank god, he's just unconscious...\*<br>"Hey! I need some help! He's wounded!"

## 7. Promotion

August 26th, 2552, 11:42 AM ONI SWORD Base courtyard 2, Planet Reach  
Almost two hours had passed since the glacier had collapsed, and nearly an hour since the scavenging teams had been sent to see if anything remained of the forerunner structure inside the glacier. During that time, I carefully removed the knife from Nima's leg and bandaged the wound as best as I could with a small medical kit that one of the other sangheili tossed to me. Since then, he had stirred a few times and seemed to be flitting in and out of consciousness, moaning and sometimes even speaking in disjointed phrases. As to whom or what he was talking to was a mystery.

>Finally, the order came to pack up, and that whatever was in the glacier was unreachable and most likely smashed beyond usefulness at this point. Since the object was beyond reach, the area was scheduled to be glassed immediately. I helped the rest of the camp pack up the

crates and get them into a phantom, then I walked over to where Nima lay and hoisted him up on my shoulder. I made my way to the phantom and sat him down against the back wall. I sat down next to him and waited for the ship to take off. The hour long flight into orbit seemed more like a decade. Nima slipped back into consciousness and started muttering something incoherently into space. Finally we docked with the 'Regretful Transcendence' and I prepared to exit the phantom. I lifted Nima, still muttering to himself, back onto my shoulder and found another wall to lean him against so I could call Undi. I hit the button on my wristguard and she picked up on her end.<br>"Yes?"

>"Hey, Undi. It's me again."<br>"Hello. It is good to hear from you."

>"It's nice to hear from you too. You're a doctor, right?"<br>Silence from the other end.

>\*Shit, I forgot about what elites think of doctors. How're you going to get out of this one, dumbass?\*<br>"No, I do not carry that... dishonorable title. But yes, I DO have some medical experience. Are you hurt?", she said. My relief was palpable.

>"I'll be fine, but my friend is unconscious. He got hit in the leg with a throwing knife and lost quite a bit of blood. I already bandaged the wound. Any ideas?"<br>"It always seems to be an emergency with you, R'tik. We should probably wake him up. I have an emergency medical kit in my office, let me retrieve it."

>I heard some rustling and a thunk on the other end.<br>"There are bandages and defibrillator here, but nothing to wake him up... You will have to take him to an infirmary."

>"Alright," I sighed. "I think there's one nearby. I'll take him there."<p>August 26th, 2552, 12:57 AM On board the 'Regretful Transcendence'<br>In orbit over Planet Reach If there was one word I could use to describe my short time in a covenant infirmary, it would probably be 'haunting.' The injured soldiers here were either barely conscious, writhing in pain, or unmoving. Some were even lying in small pools of their own blood. Even those who the attendants (I refused to call them medics. Medics heal people, these 'attendants' clearly had no intention of doing anything of the sort.) had bothered to bandage up clearly needed their bandages changed. The heavy stench of death and infection hung in the air, completely overpowering everything else. Screams of agony and low, pained groans were the predominant sounds. I was directed by one of the sangheili attendants to an empty, bloodstained cot in a corner. I laid him there and asked the attendant,

>"Is there anything that can be done for him?" The attendant simply shrugged and replied with an indifferent "He will be taken care of," and simply walked off. I looked back to Nima, lying there on the cot. I really didn't have any other options other than to leave him here. His low rank and the circumstances would probably work against him here, not to mention the horrid conditions. There were injured Zealots and Generals here. Chances were, they would be tended to first, the urgency of their treatment was greater than that of a minor.<br>After a minute of contemplation, I heard a small whimper behind me. I turned and saw a grunt huddled in a corner whose carapace and meager chest armor were cracked open. The only thing that kept his organs from being dumped onto the floor was a length of rope clumsily tied around his chest and around his methane tank. At least Nima was guaranteed some kind of attention. This grunt was likely to die here, alone and in agony.

>And no one would care.<br>I wanted to say something to him, something to perhaps cheer him up and distract him from the pain, but what was there to say? "It's going to be okay" was a blatant lie. So



instead, I turned to him and squatted down to be eye level with him. He whimpered again and scooted further into his corner.

>"P-please don't hurt me," he squeaked.<br>"No, I just wanted to thank you," I said, in my most calming tone. The grunt seemed very confused by this.

>"Thank for what? Me no do anything."<br>"For your sacrifice. How'd you get hurt? That looks pretty painful." The grunt winced and shook his head.

>"Me get stepped on by elite. Me playing dead behind cover. A little too well. He think I dead and used me to jump over." He leaned his head to see around my shoulder to look at Nima. "Me pretty sure he did it. Not his fault me play dead really good, though. Me forgive."<br>I nodded and stood up as one of the attendants walked towards me carrying a large piece of equipment with several holo-screens on it. He sat it down and removed a data pad from the side the device. Without even looking at me he asked,

>"What happened to him?"<br>"One of the humans threw a knife at him. It hit him in his thigh. He lost a lot of blood," I replied. He held the data pad over Nima's head until it beeped twice, at which point he put it back into the larger machine and looked at the holo screen.

>"Heart rates normal... He seems to be breathing normally... Minimal brain activity..." He turned to me. "He's unconscious. He'll wake up sooner or later. I'll send him out of here as soon as he's up." I was then ushered out of the infirmary and was promised that I'd be the first to know when Nima regained consciousness. Not really knowing what to do with myself, I decided to go to my quarters and take a well-deserved nap.<p>

August 26, 2552, 2:33 PM On board the 'Regretful Transcendence' in orbit over planet Reach I was rudely awakened a loud beep coming from my data pad, a message tone to be exact. I groggily reached out to the stool that served as my bedside table to see what was so goddamn important that it was necessary to interrupt my nap. I grabbed the data pad, sat up, and opened the message, which was marked as being urgent.

>\*I guess that explains the excessive loudness,\* I thought to myself.<br>The message read:

>'R'tik Remamee,<br>Congratulations on your success in slaying a demon, as well as your numerous other achievements in gaining glory on the battlefield. Your efforts have paid off, and the Committee of Promotion here on the 'Regretful Transcendence' has decided that you are more than deserving of a promotion.

>Please report to the Promotions office to receive the authorization, then go to the armory to receive your new gear.<p>

I wish you the best of luck in your future endeavors,  
Ultra.

Sincerely,  
>Kaidon and Shipmaster Rekk Mizinee'<p>

I really did not need to be reminded of most of that, especially the fact that I killed Kat... But a promotion... It would be very strange for a sangheili, especially one of my low status and rank to refuse one. It would be like seeing a starving hobo refuse a sandwich. So, I decided I had better accept it.

August 26, 2552 3:00 PM On board the 'Regretful Transcendence' in orbit over planet Reach As I was walking to the promotions office,

which was located towards the front of the battlecruiser, within a minute's walk of the bridge, I thought about some of the consequences of taking this promotion. I would most likely be put in charge of a small squad. Hardly a position of great power.

>\*Maybe Sremm will finally shut his fucking mouth about how 'beneath him' I am.\* I had seen how he acted around sangheili who outranked him. They were the only ones he would even bother listening to, let alone actually cooperate with. I smirked at the prospect of seeing Sremm's gigantic ego take a hit.<br>I arrived at the office and stood in front of the automatic door to open it. Directly inside was a desk with a middle-aged sangheili sitting behind it, typing away at a terminal with an incredibly bored look on his face. He noticed me walk in and swung his chair around to face me.

>"Name?" He asked.<br>"R'tik Remamee."

>"And I'm assuming that you are requesting a promotion?", he asked. Clearly, I wasn't the first young minor to walk through those doors with a self-confident grin on his face.<br>"Actually, I received a message earlier telling me to come here. It was signed by the shipmaster himself."

>"And I am an uggunoy!", he retorted as he swung his chair back around to face his computer. "I will see if what you say is the truth. I trust you know the punishment for faking a promotion letter."<br>"Of course." No I didn't.

>He began typing again. A few minutes later, he spoke again.<br>"Well, it seems you were being truthful about your promotion. And by the Gods, what an advancement! You are being promoted straight to Ultra! Your new armor should be ready by tomorrow."

>I turned to leave, but he stopped me by asking,<br>"What act of glory could you possibly have committed for such a jump in rank?"

>"I, uh... I slew a Demon."<br>"Wh- how?" His surprise and awe were overwhelming.

>"I'd rather not talk about it."<br>"For what reason? Surely you would want to relive the memory."

>\*Ugh! Why did I say that? Excuses, think of Excuses!\*<br>"The memory is tainted," I said, "by the deaths of many brothers..."

>"Ah... I see. I apologize." He replied.<br>I nodded and walked out the door.

End  
file.